

November 27, 2025

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

The Honourable Michael Parsa
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor, 438 University

Avenue Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Parsa:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation to inform the new Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy (OPRS). There is an urgent need to meaningfully address poverty in Ontario. We are witnessing first-hand how deeply poverty impacts health in the Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts. Poverty, homelessness, and household food insecurity (HFI) are significant and intertwined public health issues. They are systemic, widespread, and preventable contributors to poor health. These issues heighten vulnerability to chronic diseases and mental health challenges, contribute to early adversity, limit access to health and social services, and shorten life expectancy.¹⁻⁵

Far too many people are living in poverty in Ontario, placing significant strain on the health care system, the social service sector, and municipalities. During the development of our recent strategic plan, many partners expressed this concern during our community consultations. As a result, we have incorporated a strategy focused on our role in reducing poverty and homelessness within our strategic priorities.⁶ Our responses to these issues align with community needs, complement the work undertaken by our community partners, and reflect the scope of our public health mandate.

We are presenting our recommendations for inclusion in the new OPRS, along with important data related to income, homelessness, and HFI.

Recommendations

- Enhance the social assistance system in Ontario. Across Ontario, public health agencies monitor food affordability. This data repeatedly shows that households relying on social assistance do not have adequate income for the cost of living, including food.⁷ Data shows that nearly 70% of households receiving social assistance experience HFI.⁸ While many improvements are needed to strengthen the social assistance system in Ontario, several urgent recommendations include:
 - Increase Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates. We commend the government for recent improvements to ODSP, which have been critical to strengthening the program. However, current rates

- o do not reflect the true cost of living. Many Ontarians living with disabilities experience deep poverty, which further compromises their health.⁹
- o Increase Ontario Works (OW) rates, with annual increases indexed to inflation. OW rates have not increased since 2018, and this requires immediate attention given the high rates of inflation in recent years. Rates should be increased and indexed to inflation, as has been done for ODSP. OW recipients also live in deep poverty.⁹ Food affordability data for single, unattached adults shows that these households face dire financial need, with insufficient income to pay for food and rent, let alone other necessities.^{7,10}
- o Provide the shelter allowance to OW and ODSP recipients who are homeless. Data from the 2024 Nipissing District Point-in-Time Count shows that over 80% of people experiencing homelessness rely on OW or ODSP. High rent rates and low income were identified by respondents as the top barriers to securing housing.¹¹ Penalizing unhoused OW and ODSP recipients by withholding their shelter allowance worsens financial hardship and hinders their ability to secure housing. Addressing the inadequacy of social assistance is an essential component of reducing homelessness in Ontario.
- Continue to make improvements to minimum wage. Unless the minimum wage rate is increased, having a job is not enough to escape poverty. Although the recent increase to minimum wage was much needed, the current rate of \$17.60 falls short for the over 800,000 Ontarians earning minimum wage.¹² The Ontario Living Wage Network prepares annual calculations based on real costs of living across the province. In Northern Ontario, the 2025 living wage rate is \$21.10 per hour.¹³
- Increase funding to develop more safe and affordable housing options across the housing continuum. Housing unaffordability and homelessness are urgent issues in our region and across the province. In the Nipissing District, homelessness increased by 77% from 2021 to 2024. Furthermore, 67% of individuals experiencing homelessness were chronically homeless, meaning they lacked stable housing for six months or more in the previous year. This indicates there is no easy exit from homelessness.¹¹ Increased investment in safe, affordable housing, supportive housing, and prevention strategies, including increasing household income, are critical to ensuring people can afford housing and that experiences of homelessness are rare, brief, and non-recurring.¹⁴

- Include HFI as an indicator for the OPRS and set a target to reduce HFI and eliminate severe HFI by the end of the next OPRS cycle (2030). HFI is measured in Canada within the context of income, and HFI rates are at an all-time high since national monitoring began in 2004. Over four million Ontarians live with HFI, affecting one in four households, and one in three households with children in 2024.¹⁵ HFI is a sensitive marker of material deprivation and tightly tied to household income. Severe HFI is the most extreme, meaning households are skipping meals and going without food. It is associated with the worst health outcomes and highest health care costs compared with food-secure households and those living with marginal or moderate HFI.³ Research has shown that those experiencing severe HFI have more than double the health care costs of those who are food secure.¹⁶ Further, they are three times as likely to be admitted to hospital for mental health disorders.¹⁷ There is significant Canadian evidence about the effectiveness of strong income policy in reducing HFI,¹⁸ which must be considered when weighing policy options to meaningfully reduce poverty in Ontario.

Thank you for considering our evidence-informed recommendations. We have attached several key documents from our community that highlight additional data on poverty, HFI, and homelessness. Municipalities do not have the policy levers that are available to the provincial government to achieve measurable improvements on these issues. It is critical that policies implemented under the updated OPRS are evidence-based and include ongoing evaluation. The Province of Ontario has the ability to help households struggling to make ends meet. Taking further meaningful action to reduce poverty will relieve pressure on health care, social services, and municipalities, while promoting health and prosperity in Ontario.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Dr. Zimbalatti

Carol Zimbalatti, M.D., CCFP, MPH
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

Appendices:

- Appendix A: District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board Income Resource
- Appendix B: 2024 Nipissing Pit Count Infographic
- Appendix C: Food Insecurity Factsheets

1. Raphael D, Bryant T, Mikkonen J, Raphael A. Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts. Oshawa: Ontario Tech University Faculty of Health Sciences and Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management. 2020. Accessed November 24, 2025. <http://www.thecanadianfacts.org/>
2. Statistics Canada. Health of Canadians: Health Determinants. July 4, 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-570-x/2024001/section1-eng.htm>
3. Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). What are the implications of food insecurity for health and healthcare? Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>
4. Homelessness hub. Homelessness 101: health. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://homelesshub.ca/collection/homelessness-101/health/>
5. Dawdy J, Dunford K, Magalhaes Boateng K. Ontario Early Adversity and Resilience Framework. Public Health Ontario Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience Community of Practice. Accessed November 24, 2025. www.earlyadversityandresilience.ca
6. North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. 2024-2027 Strategic Plan. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/about-us/2024-2027-strategic-plan.aspx>
7. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Food insecurity & food affordability in Ontario. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario. April 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/F/25/food-insecurity-food-affordability.pdf?rev=44f83bfaac294df28af279dd38c86df9&sc_lang=en&hash=9BC8B8D46B4779F714F9D3BB4F90D166
8. Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). 2022. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/household-food-insecurity-in-canada-2021/>
9. Laidley J, Oliveira T. Welfare in Canada, 2024. Maytree Foundation. July 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <http://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada>
10. North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. Household food insecurity 2024 factsheets. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/health-topics/food-insecurity.aspx>
11. District of Nipissing Social Service Administration Board. Nipissing counts. 2024. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www.dnssab.ca/media/2kwlugre/2024-nipissing-pit-count-infographic.pdf>
12. Government of Ontario. News release: Ontario raising minimum wage to protect workers. September 29, 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1006550/ontario-raising-minimum-wage-to-protect-workers>
13. Ontario Living Wage Network. Calculating Ontario's living wage rates. November 10, 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/documentation>

14. Donaldson J, Wang D, Escamilla C, Turner A. Municipalities under pressure: The human and financial cost of Ontario's homelessness crisis. HelpSeeker. 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://www.helpseeker.org/reports/municipalities-under-pressure-the-human-and-financial-cost-of-ontarioshomelessness-crisis>
15. Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). New data on household food insecurity in 2024. May 5, 2025. Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/2025/new-data-on-household-food-insecurity-in2024/>
16. Tarasuk V, Cheng J, de Oliveira C, et al. Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs. CMAJ. 2015;187(14):E429-E36. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.150234>
17. Men F, Gundersen C, Urquia ML, et al. Food insecurity is associated with higher health care use and costs among Canadian adults. Health Affairs. 2020;39(8):1377-85. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.01637>
18. Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). What can be done to reduce food insecurity in Canada? Accessed November 24, 2025. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/2025/new-data-on-household-food-insecurity-in2024/>

Nipissing District Poverty Profile



East Ferris is **20%** higher than the province and over twice the household income in Mattawa.



Real household income growth since the previous 2016 census.

Median Income 2020
\$72,500

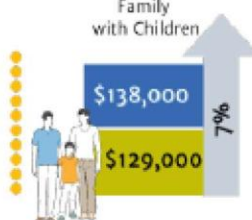
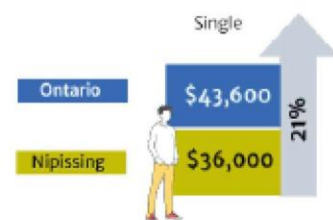
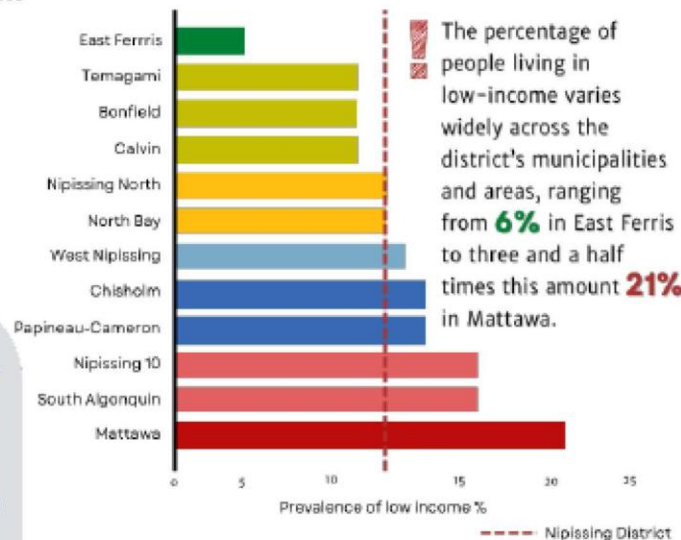
Nipissing District has the **FIFTH LOWEST** household income in the province.



The **total median household income** in Ontario is **25.5%** higher than in Nipissing District



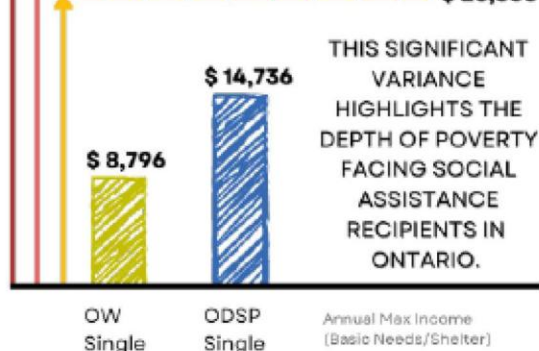
Based on the Low Income Measure-After Tax, **13.0%** of persons in private households in Nipissing District are living in low income. In absolute terms, this amounts to close to **11,000** people.



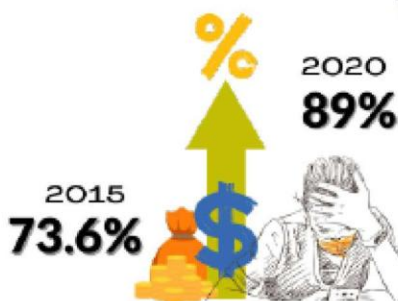
ONTARIO **SINGLE** MEDIAN INCOME
\$43,600

NIPISSING DISTRICT **SINGLE** MEDIAN INCOME
\$36,000

ONTARIO LIM-AT **SINGLE** INCOME
\$26,503



THIS SIGNIFICANT VARIANCE HIGHLIGHTS THE DEPTH OF POVERTY FACING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS IN ONTARIO.



In 2020, 89% of Nipissing's population received some amount of government income, up sharply from 73.6% in 2015. This increase was mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency and recovery benefits.

NIPISSING DISTRICT

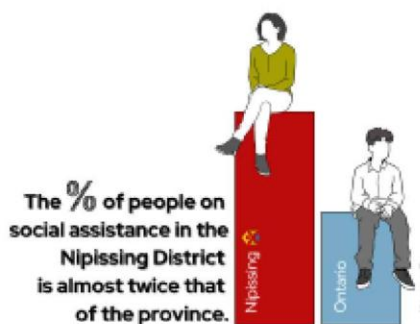


Government transfers are **6%** higher and Market Income is **6%** lower in the Nipissing District.

ONTARIO



The Nipissing District has one of the lowest shares of market income and highest shares of government transfers in the province.



5% INCREASE IN ODSP RATES AS OF SEPT 2022



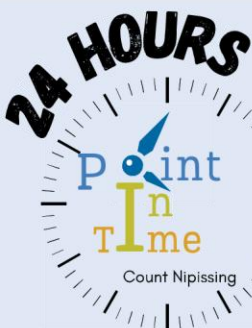
NO INCREASE IN OW RATES SINCE 2018

OW & ODSP ANNUAL INCOME COMPARISON





On **Wednesday, October 9 at 8:00 am to Thursday, October 16 at 8:00 am**, a Point in Time (PiT) Count and survey of homelessness was conducted across Nipissing District.



48 locations

67 surveyors



531

Individuals identified as homeless

130 (25%)

In Emergency Shelters

138 (26%)

Unsheltered

117 (22%)

In Public Institutions

80 (15%)

Hidden Homeless

66 (12%)

Transitionally Housed



Includes **31 children** under the age of 16 identified as homeless

Key Findings

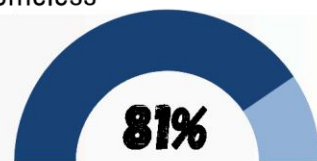
Based on
304

Completed Surveys



32%

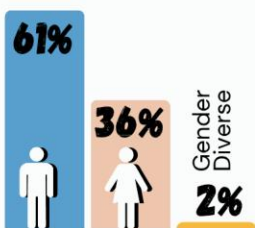
of respondents identified as having been in foster care or a group home



81%

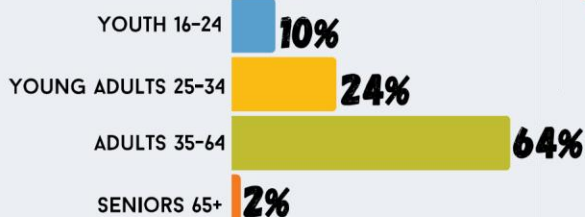
of respondents were single

Gender Identity



Gender Diverse

Age



Veterans

6% of respondents identified as being a former military or RCMP member



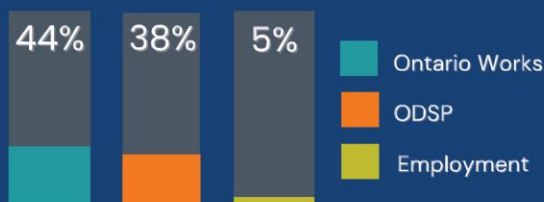
48%

Identify as Indigenous

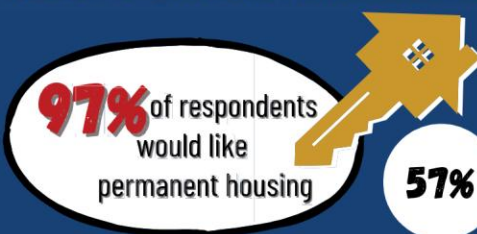
44% First experienced homelessness before the age of 25



Sources of income



Rates of Chronic Homelessness



97% of respondents would like permanent housing

67%

of respondents were homeless for six months or more in the last year

57%

of respondents were homeless for eighteen months or more in the past three years

Top 5 reasons for most recent housing loss

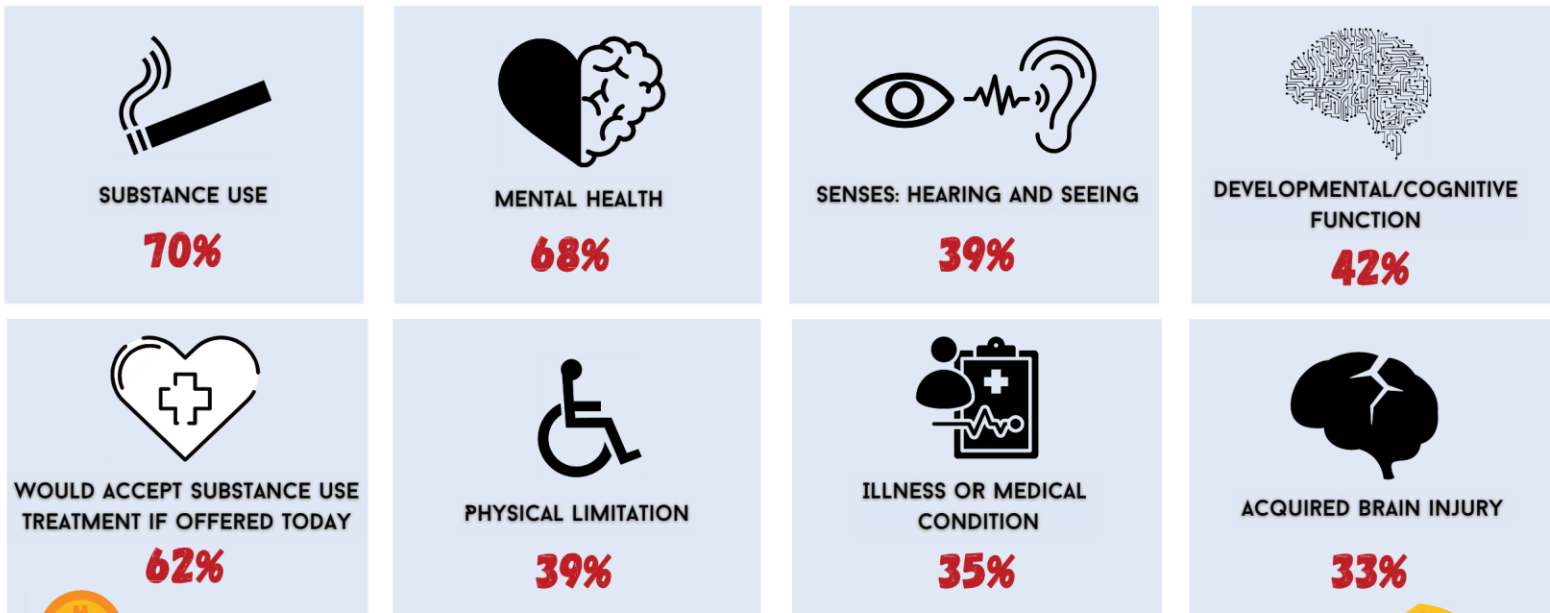
- ✗ Conflict with Landlord **22%**
- ✗ Not Enough Income **21%**
- ✗ Conflict with Spouse/Partner **18%**
- ✗ Mental Health **7%**
- ✗ Substance Use **7%**



Top 5 barriers to finding housing

- ✗ Rent's Too High **84%**
- ✗ Low Income **75%**
- ✗ Discrimination **31%**
- ✗ Addiction/Substance Use **28%**
- ✗ Poor Housing Condition **27%**

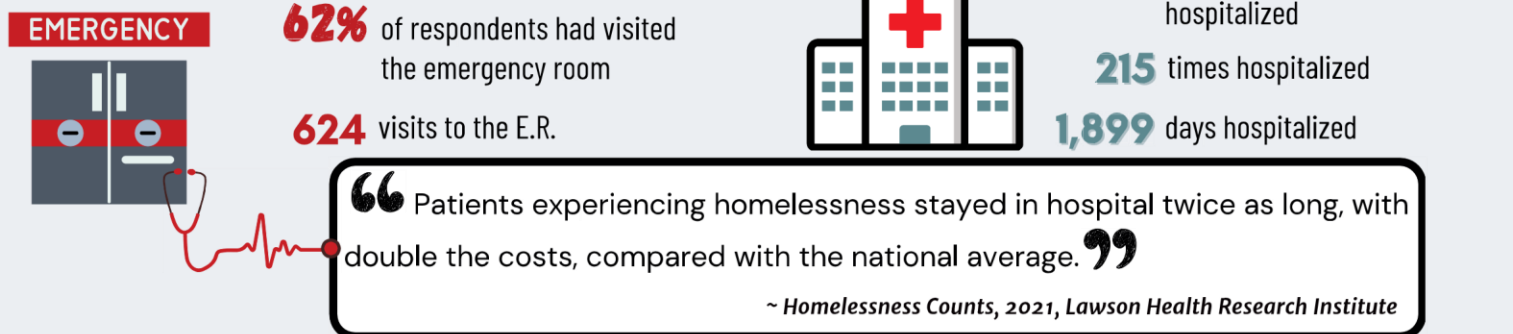


Health and Disability Topics of those Surveyed

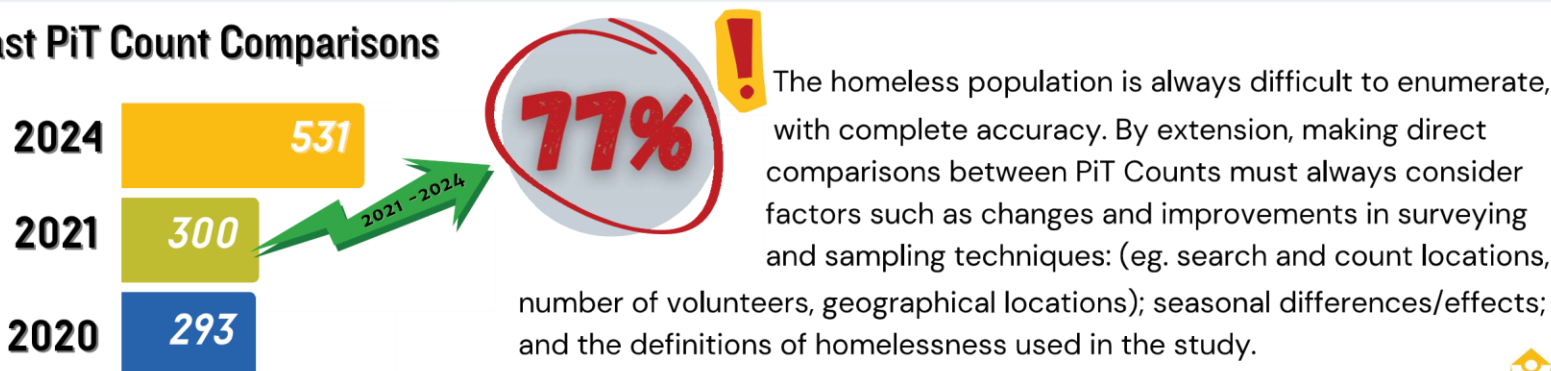


 Homelessness results in significant excess health care costs and resources 

In the last 12 months...



Past PiT Count Comparisons



Household Food Insecurity

North Bay Parry Sound District: 2024

When there isn't enough money for food.

In Canada, household food insecurity is measured in relation to income. It ranges from worrying about running out of food, to limiting food choices, to reducing food intake or going without food.

Stronger income-related policies can reduce household food insecurity.



One in four households
live with household food
insecurity in our district.

**Household food insecurity is a serious public health problem.
It leads to increased risk of:**

Poor Physical Health



- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Oral health issues
- Chronic pain

Poor Mental Health



- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood disorders
- Suicidal thoughts

Higher Healthcare Costs



North Bay Parry Sound District
Health Unit

Bureau de santé
du district de North Bay-Parry Sound

Statistics Canada. (2024, December 2). Food security. www160.statcan.gc.ca/prosperity-prosperite/food-security-securite-alimentaire-eng.htm
Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA, Tarasuk V. (2023). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2022. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). proof.utoronto.ca
Public Health Ontario. (2025, August 14). Household food insecurity snapshot. publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity
Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). (n.d.). What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/

Food Affordability

North Bay Parry Sound District: 2024

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey used by public health in Ontario to estimate food costs. It includes a list of food items that follow Canada's Food Guide. The results are used to assess how affordable it is to eat well in relation to household income and local rent rates.

How much does it cost monthly to eat well ?

Family of four

\$1, 243

Two parents 31-50 yrs
Youth 14-18 yrs
Child 4-8 yrs



Couple

\$719

Two people 31-50 yrs



Pregnant single person



19-30 yrs

\$459

Single person



31-50 yrs

\$432

Single parent with older kids

\$927

Parent 31-50 yrs
Youth 14-18 yrs
Child 4-8 yrs



Single parent with young kids

\$729

Parent 31-50 yrs
Two children 2-4 yrs



Single older person








70+ yrs

\$309

Is Food Affordable?

It depends on household income.

People relying on social assistance programs are at very high risk of living with household food insecurity. The following income scenarios show that social assistance rates in Ontario do not reflect the costs of living.

	Single Parent with Two Kids Under 17	Single Person 31- 50 yrs	Family of Four with Two Kids Under 17
	Ontario Works Monthly Income \$2692	Ontario Works Monthly Income \$895	Ontario Works Monthly Income \$2930
	Rent (2 bedroom) \$1240	Rent (bachelor) \$737	Rent (3 bedroom) \$1448
	Groceries \$927	Groceries \$432	Groceries \$1243
	Remaining \$525	Remaining -\$274	Remaining \$239

Social assistance rates in Ontario are too low.

Households who struggle to pay for food also struggle to pay for other basic costs of living, such as transportation, utilities, phone bill, clothing and personal care products. Increasing social assistance rates in Ontario can reduce household food insecurity.